

The problems associated with overwintering the larvae of this species are well known and several authors have commented upon this. J. E. Robson (1899. A Catalogue of the Lepidoptera of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne. *Trans. nat. Hist. Soc. Northumberland, Durham & Newcastle-upon-Tyne* **12**, pt.1) recommended collecting full-fed larvae in spring as overwintering them was so difficult. This problem was partially solved by G. Bolam (1925. The Lepidoptera of Northumberland & the Eastern Borders. *History of Berwick Naturalists Club* **25**) who turned out larvae in the autumn onto the straw mulching on his Strawberry beds, collecting the larvae when they re-appeared in the spring. He did not, however, give any indication of how many larvae were turned out or indeed how many survived.

In all, forty-eight specimens emerged between 29 May and 5 June 2001. Of these 35 were female and 13 male. The colouration of both sexes was typical of local specimens with no variation at all. The male specimens had a wingspan which was remarkably consistent, ranging from 38-40 mm. The females on the other hand, showed considerable variation in wingspan, varying from 40 mm in the smallest specimen to 60 mm in the largest, measurements being made from wing tip to wing tip on set specimens. Surplus adult specimens were released on the site from where the larvae were originally obtained. The remaining single pupa proved to be parasitised; a male *Tachina grossa* (Dip.: Tachinidae) emerged in early July 2001.

It would appear that in order to be successful in rearing this, and perhaps other moorland species which overwinter in the larval stage, the natural conditions of the habitat be duplicated as closely as possible and that exposure to the elements during the winter is an essential requirement. Six larvae of the Ruby Tiger *Phragmatobia fuliginosa* (L.), a species which also over-winters as a larva, were also enclosed in the cages with the Fox Moth larvae. In early March 2001 these larvae re-appeared and started to feed up and by the end of the month had pupated. Six adults of ssp. *borealis* (Stdgr.), the local moorland form, emerged in May 2001.— HARRY T. EALES, 11 Ennerdale Terrace, Low Westwood, Co. Durham NE17 7PN.

Has the flight period of the common spring *Orthosia* species (Lep.: Noctuidae) changed?

Recent issues of this journal have carried a number of reports of unseasonal records of Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi* (Fabr.) and Hebrew Character *O. gothica* (L.) amongst others. It is good to receive these, since it is judged important in these days of apparent climate change to place on record such observations of clearly relevant aspects of the natural world. With these records in mind, I wondered if there had, at the same time, been any discernible shift in the main flight period of these two species, or of that of any other common Spring noctuids moths.

My garden here in north-east Hertfordshire is the only site for which I have been able to run a trap on a more or less nightly basis throughout a period that includes all of the alleged flight period of these moths, for a substantial number of years that includes 2001 (the last year for which full records can yet be available). I moved here in 1987 and so my analysis involved the 14 years from 1988 to 2001 inclusive, except that in the late 1990s I was, for a variety of reasons, not able to run the trap at the appropriate time of year. The data are presented in Table 1.

Species	parameter	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Orthosia cerasi	1st date	19.iii	8.iii	23.ii	11.iii	17.iii	6.iii	*	*	*	2.iii	13.ii	12.iii	26.ii	11.ii	11.ii
	last date	13.v	18.v	13.v	12.v	14.v	*	*	*	*	*	before 23.v	12.v	13.v	12.v	
Orthosia gothica	1st date	22.iii	10.iii	4.iii	11.iii	17.iii	6.iii	*	*	*	2.iii	20.iii	12.iii	26.ii	9.iii	21.ii
	last date	28.v	27.v	16.v	19.v	22.v	*	*	*	*	*	before 23.v	12.v	15.v	25.v	
Orthosia incerta	1st date	22.iii	19.iii	20.iii	11.iii	17.iii	6.iii	*	*	*	10.iii	14.ii	16.iii	8.iii	7.iii	25.ii
	last date	26.v	23.v	13.v	12.v	14.v	*	*	*	*	*	before 23.v	12.v	15.v	9.v	
Xylocampa areola	1st date	2.iv	10.iii	17.iii	22.iii	17.iii	*	*	*	*	2.iii	25.ii	16.iii	7.iii	15.iii	4.iii
	last date	17.v	23.v	16.v	26.v	22.v	*	*	*	*	*	before 23.v	*	14.v	12.v	

Table 1. First and last dates of selected moth species at Bishops Stortford.

Year 2002 data is incomplete, since this Note was, of necessity, prepared during early March in that year. * Indicates that sufficient trapping was not carried out in the appropriate period to permit distinction of the date indicated (e.g., during 1993 I was away from 7 March and so missed the emergence of *X. areola* and I missed the end of all the species because I was, similarly, elsewhere around the end of May).

The following comments can be made on the data in Table 1:

***Orthosia cerasi* Common Quaker**

In the period 1988 to 1993 emergence appears to be during the first three weeks of March, with an early appearance in 1990 on 23 February. However, from 1997 to 2002, the norm appears to be the first two weeks of February with late-comers on 26 February in 2000 and 2 March in 1997. Thus, there does seem to be a clear trend towards emergence approximately three weeks to a month earlier over the 14 year survey period. However, the flight period ends consistently over this period, between 12 and 18 May.

***Orthosia gothica* Hebrew Character**

During 1998 to 1993, emergence takes place between 4 and 22 March, with no February reports; in the period 1997 to 2002 it is between 21 February and 20 March, with two of the six reports during February. As with *O. cerasi*, there may be a trend towards earlier emergence, though it is less clear cut in this species. The end of the flight period falls within the range of 12 to 28 May in all years.

***Orthosia incerta* Clouded Drab**

Adults appear consistently between the second and third weeks of March (range 6 to 22 March) except during 2002 when the first record was made on 25 February (nine days ahead of the stated range). This one odd occurrence may be a fluke and is not statistically significant. As with the previous two species, there is no discernible shift in the end of the flight period, last records falling in the period 9 to 26 May throughout the 14 years.

***Xylocampa areola* Early Grey**

Although there is a wide range of first dates, from 4 March to 2 April, there does not seem to be a trend towards earlier emergence. The end of the flight period is, as in the other species analysed, unaltered, falling between 12 and 26 May.

This is all terribly unscientific and I am sure that my academic colleagues will probably excommunicate me! However, it does appear that at least the Common Quaker, and perhaps also the Hebrew Character, may be tending towards a generally earlier emergence. It is of interest that, in spite of this, the end of the flight period is unaltered for all the species studied; for the moths, like me, early retirement is obviously not on! If this snippet of information motivates others to approach the matter in a more scientific manner I shall consider this note to have been well worth writing.—COLIN W. PLANT, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3QP (E-mail: Colinwplant@ntlworld.com).

A further autumn record of the Common Quaker, *Orthosia cerasi* (Fabr.) (Lep.: Noctuidae)

Brian Goodey (*antea*: 35) reported the occurrence of a specimen of *Orthosia cerasi* (Fabr.) in South Essex on 16 October 2001. I can add that I caught one in my garden in Earley, near Reading (O.S., grid reference SU 735710), almost exactly ten years earlier on the night of 8-9 October 1991. The specimen is in my collection.

My garden mercury vapour trap is not run routinely, but was run on the four nights 7 to 10 October 1991, producing the *cerasi*, expected autumnal species and one late brood example of the pyralid *Hypsopygia costalis* (Fabr.) (on 9 October 1991).—NORMAN HALL, 44 Harcourt Drive, Earley, Reading RG6 5TJ (E-mail: norman.hall@talk21.com).